

‘Le Siècle de Louis XIV’: Frederick the Great and French Ways of War

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Nothing seems more typically ‘Prussian’ than the wars of Frederick the Great. Frederick’s aggressive campaigns have been portrayed as precursors of Germany’s strategy in the First and Second World Wars, his military methods supposedly reflecting a ‘German Way of War’ shaped by Prussia-Germany’s geopolitical position.¹ This article, however, for the first time examines systematically the intellectual inspirations for Frederick’s military ideas, focusing on the period up to the Seven Years War (1756-63). It shows that Frederick was primarily inspired by France, and particularly by the towering figure of King Louis XIV.

Recent years have seen an outpouring of new research on Frederick the Great. The king’s sexuality, his writings, and his single-minded pursuit of glory in all its forms have all been fundamentally re-assessed.² There has, however, been no fundamental re-evaluation of the Prussian king’s activities as a soldier. Jürgen Luh and Andreas Pečar re-examined Frederick’s military writings, and Franz Szabo criticized his generalship during the Seven Years War, but no historian has systematically examined what *influenced* Frederick’s military ideas.³ Many scholars have noted that Frederick read classical history and the works of Voltaire, but they have said little about how this shaped his war-making.⁴ In 1890, Max Jähns noted that the work of Antoine de Pas, Marquis de Feuquières (a French general under Louis XIV) shaped several of Frederick’s military treatises and his 1778-9 campaign plans. Jähns did not, however, examine any other figures who influenced Frederick, or their impact on his generalship in the field.⁵ The German General Staff in 1899 noted that Frederick read the works of Feuquières, the Marquis of Santa Cruz, the Marquis de Quincy, the Chevalier de Folard, the Marquis de Puységur, Maurice de Saxe, and the *Memoires* of Turenne. However,

since they argued that ‘Frederick towered so much above his contemporaries that . . . after 1745, he only occasionally taught them and no longer learned from them’, the General Staff did not examine whether Frederick learned anything from these works.⁶ Johannes Kunisch examined Frederick’s generalship in three successive books but, while he noted that Frederick was inspired by French literary fiction extolling military glory, the only work of military science or history that he described Frederick reading was Voltaire’s *History of Charles XII*.⁷ Jay Luvaas described books that Frederick read, and quoted his praise for several historical generals, but did not discuss how this shaped Frederick’s practical military leadership.⁸ Christopher Duffy mentioned Frederick’s interest in Feuquières, reflected briefly on the intellectual origins of Frederick’s ‘oblique order’, and noted that Santa Cruz inspired his 1757 ‘Parchwitz Address’ and his July 1760 disgrace of the Regiment of Anhalt-Bernburg, but Duffy did not establish any broader conclusions about how Frederick’s reading shaped his military actions and military writings.⁹

The failure to examine systematically the intellectual underpinnings for Frederick’s war-making has fostered widely-held ideas that Frederick’s generalship reflected a specifically German military tradition. Christopher Clark, Brendan Simms and others have emphasized Prussia-Germany’s exposed position in the centre of Europe, and historians such as Karl-Heinz Frieser and Robert Citino have argued that this ‘central position’ fostered a ‘German Way of War’ that sought to use swift, pre-emptive attacks to achieve a decisive victory against one opponent before others could intervene, and that was marked by ‘an extremely high level of battlefield aggression’ and a fondness for outflanking manoeuvres.¹⁰

Frederick’s surprise attacks, his proclivity for seeking battle, and his tactic of the ‘oblique order’ have indeed seemed to prefigure later German practice, while his famous injunction that ‘our wars must be short and lively’, as Prussia lacked the resources for a long struggle,

has been portrayed as the classic example of Prussia-Germany's search for quick wars ended through decisive victories.¹¹ By examining not Frederick's military actions or his military ideas but rather the intellectual influences behind them, however, this article demonstrates that, during the first half of his reign, Frederick was greatly inspired by French examples. It is therefore not accurate to speak of a 'German Way of War' in the eighteenth century, and the whole concept of national ways of war is open to question, given the importance of trans-national movements of ideas in shaping military thought.

It is well known that French culture was hugely influential across Europe throughout the long eighteenth century, and that King Louis XIV of France fundamentally shaped monarchical self-representation in western Europe in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹² Tim Blanning has argued, however, that Louis XIV's baroque style of monarchy, focused on representation, became out-dated in the course of the eighteenth century, and that Frederick the Great exemplified the new generation of monarchs who abandoned baroque representation and instead appealed to the new public sphere.¹³ Martin Wrede similarly argued that, whereas Louis XIV rarely led his armies from the front, Frederick's assumption of personal military command reflected the new Enlightenment idea of the 'great man' ('*grand homme*'), whose greatness should be earned by personal merit. Wrede called this a 'paradigm shift in the recognition of royal greatness'.¹⁴ Blanning's claims have been challenged by Thomas Biskup, who has shown that Frederick embraced magnificent courtly representation when it suited him, and that his cultural patronage focused on emulating the achievements of the Sun King, described by Voltaire in his book *The Age of Louis XIV (Le Siècle de Louis XIV)*.¹⁵ This article shows that the impact of Louis XIV, and the huge influence of French culture, extended into the military sphere as well, as Frederick sought to out-do the Sun King and to emulate the tactics and strategy of his generals. It also

demonstrates that Frederick's attempt to create his own 'Age of Louis XIV' in military terms was inspired by Voltaire. While the example of Frederick shows how the personal military leadership of many eighteenth-century monarchs responded to Enlightenment ideas, it also demonstrates that both rulers and enlightened philosophers often looked backwards toward older monarchical examples.¹⁶ Frederick's victories in the Seven Years War represented the culmination, not the eclipse, of the Louisquatorzean military tradition.

I. The *Grand Homme*

The Enlightenment and the rise of the public sphere in the eighteenth century set new standards of monarchical legitimation. Whereas the later seventeenth century celebrated secrecy as conferring power and authority, stressing representation of monarchical achievements, Enlightenment ideas required a *grand homme* to earn their greatness not through birth or military glory but through service to humanity, and through merit displayed in the public sphere.¹⁷ Frederick had been exposed to the concept of the *grand homme* in the 1730s by Voltaire, the Saxon diplomat Manteuffel, and his colleague Suhm.¹⁸ In March 1737, Frederick told Voltaire that, 'I am . . . neither a *grand homme* nor a candidate to be one'.¹⁹ This was an invitation for Voltaire to assure him that he was indeed one, which Voltaire did repeatedly over the following months.²⁰ As king, Frederick sought to achieve immortality in the enlightened public sphere – and the status of *grand homme* – by becoming both a patron of culture and a writer in his own right.²¹

The concept of *grand homme*, however, could also be applied to military figures. Military glory had previously been a prime criterion for greatness, and military authors of the early eighteenth century referred to great generals as *grands hommes* and urged young officers to read about their exploits.²² Even the French Enlightenment was not uniformly critical of war,

and enlightened authors wrote about ‘heroes’ such as Alexander the Great and Charles XII of Sweden even though they did not fit the Enlightenment definition of *grands hommes*.²³ In January 1738, Voltaire described Frederick exemplifying the qualities of a *grand homme* even when administering his regiment, saying that a *grand homme* would both ‘win battles’ and ‘ensure the welfare of his subjects’.²⁴ Frederick’s 1740 *Refutation of the Prince of Machiavelli*, which was intended to establish his enlightened credentials, already reflected such ideas, emphasizing that a prince was ‘protector and defender of his peoples’ just as much as ‘chief justice’, and should therefore command his army personally.²⁵ Celebrating two classic *grands hommes* in Lorenzo de Medici and Marcus Aurelius, the *Refutation* also stressed their military achievements, calling the former ‘pacifier of Italy’ and the latter ‘no less successful warrior than sage philosopher’.²⁶ Frederick (and Voltaire, who edited the *Refutation*) clearly considered personal military command to be among the duties of an enlightened prince and *grand homme*.²⁷

Biskup has shown that Frederick sought throughout his reign to emulate the cultural patronage of Louis XIV, described in Voltaire’s *Age of Louis XIV*. The 1750 Berlin carrousel – emulating Louis’s carrouseles of 1662 and 1664 – was the climax of this programme.²⁸ Both d’Alembert and Kant spoke flatteringly of an ‘Age of Frederick’.²⁹ Voltaire, however, also presented Louis as an example of how *not* to be a war leader, describing the Sun King’s military victories as overwhelmingly the work of his generals and ministers, his famous sieges of cities conducted for him by Vauban, with Louis merely taking credit.³⁰ Manteuffel, and the Prussian minister Grumbkow, similarly told Frederick that Louis had never recovered from the loss of able generals and ministers like Turenne, Condé, Luxembourg, Créqui, the le Tellier, and Colbert.³¹ Frederick read drafts of *The Age of Louis XIV* in the 1730s, and his *Refutation of Machiavelli* followed Voltaire, praising the cultural achievements of Louis’s

reign but speaking disparagingly of ‘the greatly exaggerated passage of the Rhine’ in 1672, ‘the siege of Mons where Louis was present in person’ (but where, by implication, he did not actually conduct the siege operations) and ‘the battle of Turin, which M. de Marsin caused the Duc d’Orleans to lose’ (thus noting not only the defeat but also that command was exercised by a general, not by the royal prince himself).³²

In the tradition of Voltaire, Frederick’s 1751 *History of the House of Brandenburg* emphasized both monarchical cultural patronage and personal military command. The work was written jointly with Voltaire, in conscious emulation of the *Age of Louis XIV*, and emphasized that fame was not heritable but earned through merit, and conferred by the public.³³ Frederick therefore portrayed the Great Elector (whom he presented as a less successful version of himself) as greater than Louis XIV.³⁴ While Louis ‘protected all the talents’ (cultural patronage), Frederick emphasized that the Great Elector, ‘held by himself the position of minister and general’.³⁵ ‘The French monarch is worthy of praise for having followed the path to glory that [Cardinal] Richelieu prepared for him: the German hero did more: he opened the path himself’.³⁶ In the military sphere, Frederick presented the Great Elector (and himself) as achieving what Voltaire criticized Louis for failing to achieve.

Both of these princes commanded their armies: one having beneath him the most celebrated captains of Europe, relying for his success on the likes of Turenne, Condé and Luxembourg . . . The other, scarcely having troops, and lacking wise generals, supplied what he lacked through his own powerful genius: he formed his projects and executed them . . . and . . . he regarded war as his profession.³⁷

Following Voltaire, Frederick described Louis ‘conducting campaigns through grandeur; he besieged towns, but avoided battles’.³⁸ Quoting Voltaire’s book almost verbatim, Frederick described how Louis ‘encouraged his troops by his presence while they crossed the Rhine’, thereby emphasizing that the crossing was achieved by the French troops, not through Louis’s personal merit.³⁹ Frederick compared the swift French conquests of the 1667-8 War of Devolution with his own conquest of Silesia, describing how, ‘Louis XIV seized part of the Spanish Netherlands almost without resistance; the following winter, he took Franche-Comté through the efforts of the Prince de Condé’.⁴⁰ Readers would have remembered that Frederick had similarly captured the almost undefended province of Silesia through a winter campaign, and Frederick thus staked a claim to military achievements comparable with Louisquatorzean France. Frederick referred to the War of Devolution again a few pages later, emphasizing that Louis had only ‘assisted’ in the campaigns, while ‘the generals took all the fortified towns of Flanders from the Spaniards, and . . . Condé subjugated Franche-Comté for France in less than three weeks’.⁴¹ Frederick, in contrast, had actually commanded his troops in person, and thus demonstrated the personal merit required of a *grand homme*.

Frederick returned to this theme in his July 1757 *Reasons for my Military Conduct*, defending his disastrous decision to fight the battle of Kolin. ‘While Louis XIV besieged Mons,’ said Frederick, ‘his brother the Duc d’Orleans, or rather Monsieur de Luxembourg, who commanded the army of observation, beat the Prince of Orange . . . , who wanted to relieve the town’.⁴² Frederick (who had fought at Kolin to protect his own siege of Prague) thus portrayed himself as emulating not Louis XIV but Luxembourg, and emphasized that, whereas he commanded the army himself, even Louis’s brother was only titular commander of the army that made Louis’s siege possible.

In a September 1743 letter to Voltaire lamenting the decline of French power, Frederick looked toward ‘a king worthy of command, who . . . could restore [France’s] ancient splendour’. Frederick described such a monarch as a ‘*grand homme*’, and portrayed him in specifically military terms, saying, ‘a sovereign can never attain more glory than when he defends his peoples against their furious enemies and when, changing the state of affairs, he finds the means to reduce his adversaries humbly to demanding peace’.⁴³ Frederick was clearly referring to himself. He could claim to be ‘worthy of command’, and he had changed the map of Europe and forced Austria to make peace. Frederick was inviting Voltaire to present him to enlightened public opinion in Paris as heir to the glory of Louis XIV.

From the 1730s onward, Frederick routinely described successful generals as *grands hommes*. His 1738 *Considerations on the Present State of the European Body Politic* named Cromwell, William III, Tilly, Montecuccoli, Eugene, Marlborough and Villars as *grands hommes*, and Frederick in 1740 used the appellation to flatter Marshal Münnich and Cardinal Fleury.⁴⁴ Frederick’s writings in the 1740s and 1750s described Gustav Adolf, Eugene and Maurice de Saxe as *grands hommes*.⁴⁵ Most notably, Frederick used the appellation *grand homme* to enhance the reputation of the leader of the war party at the French court, Count Belle-Isle.⁴⁶ In May 1741, after Belle-Isle had visited his camp at Mollwitz, Frederick called him a *grand homme* in a letter to his envoy in St. Petersburg, and wrote to Voltaire calling Belle-Isle, ‘a very great man. A Newton, at least when making war’.⁴⁷ In December 1741, Frederick asked Fleury ‘for the most pressing reasons, to send Monsieur de Belle-Isle to the army in Bohemia’, saying, ‘the weight of the reputation of that *grand homme* decides, in part, the success of your enterprises.’⁴⁸ This was a transparent attempt to encourage greater French involvement in the war against Austria, but Frederick clearly thought that Voltaire

and Fleury would find the appellation of *grand homme*, and the comparison with Newton, convincing.

Frederick's claim that military victories should confer the status of *grand homme* is vividly illustrated in his tracts of the 1770s lamenting the frustration of these hopes. Frederick's 1770 *Examination of the Essay on Prejudices* defended the 'merit' of great generals such as Scipio, Gustav Adolf, Turenne, Marlborough, Eugene and Saxe, arguing that they, too, served society.⁴⁹ The 1779 *Letters on the Love of the Fatherland* named numerous soldiers as *grands hommes*: the Seigneur de Bayard, Bertrand du Guesclin, Bernhard of Weimar, Turenne, Condé, Luxembourg, Villars, Marlborough, and several Prussian generals. Frederick compared Eugene and Saxe with Colbert, Newton and Leibniz, calling all of them *grands hommes*.⁵⁰ Frederick's 1773 *Dialogue of the Dead between Prince Eugene, Milord Marlborough and the Prince von Liechtenstein*, specifically lamented the failure to recognize the achievements of great generals.⁵¹ 'Why this fierceness against the most noble of professions?' demanded Frederick's Marlborough, referring to enlightened criticism of war.⁵² Reacting indignantly to criticism of Marlborough in Britain, Frederick's Prince Eugene demanded, 'What! Can Höchstädt, Ramillies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet not serve as shield to the name of this *grand homme*?'⁵³ It was a specific claim that victory in battle should confer the status of *grand homme*.

Enlightenment ideas were certainly not the only inspiration for Frederick's personal military command. Louis XIV and Emperor Leopold I had introduced personal rule in the 1660s, and Frederick William I's advice to his successor that 'you must . . . take sole and personal command of the army' reflected such ideas.⁵⁴ Frederick's insistence in his 1752 political testament that 'a sovereign must rule personally' reflected the spirit of Louis XIV, and the

French ambassador in Berlin specifically compared Frederick's style of government with the Sun King's personal rule.⁵⁵ Personal command by the monarch was also a response to the Prussian army's difficulties in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when generals often refused to accept the authority of commanders of lower noble rank.⁵⁶ The *Refutation of Machiavelli* noted that 'the august presence of the prince puts an end . . . to the misunderstandings of the generals, so dreadful for armies and so prejudicial to the interests of their master'. Even here, however, Frederick referred to the French experience under Louis XIV, as described by Voltaire. The *Refutation of Machiavelli* argued that, if a prince commanded in person, 'the war will always go better than when the general is under the tutelage of the ministry, which, not being with the army, is out of reach of judging things, and which often stops the most able general from being in a state to give evidence of his ability'.⁵⁷ This reflected a common belief that the French armies of Louis XIV had been held back by central control from Versailles.⁵⁸ Noting the disastrous French decision to remain within their entrenchments at Turin in 1706, rather than concentrate to fight the allied army, Voltaire commented, 'that order, given in Versailles, caused 60,000 men to be dispersed'.⁵⁹ Thus, whether seen as 'personal rule', escaping 'the tutelage of the ministry', or showing the personal merit of a *grand homme*, Frederick's personal command of his armies looked back to the figure of Louis XIV, primarily as transmitted to him by Voltaire.

II. The Oblique Order

Since Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* described Louis's military glory as primarily the work of his generals and ministers, Frederick's attempt to create an 'Age of Frederick', where he would out-do Louis by commanding his armies personally, also involved emulating the great generals of the Sun King. When Voltaire flatteringly spoke of an 'Age of Frederick', he referred not to Louis himself but to his generals and ministers, saying, 'Europe is no longer in

the time of Condé and Turenne, but in the time of Frederick', 'Colbert, Louvois and Turenne were not worth as much as the one whose name begins with an F'.⁶⁰ Indeed, the wars of Louis XIV had huge importance in the memory of the European military aristocracy. Frederick William I regarded his participation in the 1709 battle of Malplaquet as the best day of his life, and celebrated it every year with his old comrades.⁶¹ When Frederick's brother, Prince Henry, created a gallery of great generals at Schloss Rheinsberg in 1778, the only figures memorialized there apart from contemporary Prussian commanders were French generals from the age of Louis XIV: Turenne, Condé, Luxembourg and Catinat.⁶² Congratulating Frederick on his victory at the battle of Hohenfriedberg in June 1745, his mother, Queen Sophie Dorothea, said that not even at the battles of Höchstädt and Fontenoy had so many drums, standards and cannon been captured.⁶³ She thus compared her son's achievement to the latest success of the French army, and to perhaps the most famous recent German victory over the French. When the Prussian Colonel Zastrow flatteringly congratulated Frederick in 1753 on his *General Principles of War*, he claimed that, 'the great masters named in it, such as Caesar, Condé, Turenne, Eugene and Luxembourg, would themselves not be ashamed to use much from it.'⁶⁴ Clearly, Zastrow saw these figures, overwhelmingly from the age of Louis XIV, as the key yardstick against which to measure military commanders.

The most important figure in Frederick's attempt to achieve his own 'Age of Louis XIV' in the military sphere was Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne. Frederick clearly wanted to be seen as Turenne, because Voltaire flattered the king in 1742 and 1757 by saying that people were comparing him with Turenne.⁶⁵ In his writings, Frederick particularly focused on the brilliant campaign from December 1674 to January 1675 in which Turenne, having seemingly gone into winter quarters in Lorraine, executed a surprise march

to fall upon the Imperial forces in Alsace (the Great Elector among them), defeating them at Mulhouse and Turckheim and driving them across the Rhine. Frederick referred to the campaign repeatedly and in detail, including in writings intended for his officers.⁶⁶ In March 1757, Field Marshal Kurt Christoph von Schwerin and General Hans Karl von Winterfeldt justified their plan for a pre-emptive attack into Bohemia by saying that it would enable the Prussians to win a victory comparable to Turenne's Turckheim campaign.⁶⁷

The most important book Frederick read about Turenne was Nicholas Deschamps's *Memoir of the Two Last Campaigns of Monsieur de Turenne in Germany*. Frederick first referred to the work in a March 1744 letter to his envoy Chambrier in Paris, in which he said that Marshal Belle-Isle had sent it to him 'while I was campaigning in Silesia' (probably in 1741), but that Frederick had 'casually lost it'. He told Chambrier to ask the marshal to send him another copy.⁶⁸ Deschamps's work was one of only three military books that Frederick asked his former tutor Duhan to send to him after his personal library was captured by the Austrians at Soor in October 1745.⁶⁹ By the end of his life, Frederick had six editions of Deschamps's book, including in his favourite libraries at Sans Souci and the Potsdam City Palace, as well as in Breslau (convenient for campaigning).⁷⁰ His last reader, Dantal, recorded that he read the work to Frederick in 1786.⁷¹ In his introduction to the *Excerpt* he commissioned of Folard's work in 1753, Frederick declared that Turenne's 'two last campaigns . . . are counted among our greatest classic books'.⁷² In his 1748 *General Principles of War*, Frederick told his officers: 'read the last two campaigns of Turenne and study them often: This is the masterpiece of modern ruses'.⁷³

Deschamps described how the allies, in January 1675, took up a position near Colmar that was impossible to attack. Turenne, however, slipped his left wing behind hills to capture the

unoccupied village of Turckheim. Thereby, ‘Monsieur de Turenne . . . found himself on [the enemy’s] flank, and rendered useless all the precautions that they had taken to their front’. Turenne’s right flank, under the Comte de Lorge, stood in front of the enemy but some way back, safe from attack. ‘By this disposition, he put himself in a state to profit from the movements that the enemy would be obliged to make’.⁷⁴ The battle of Turckheim thus bore a striking similarity to the Frederickian oblique line, used at the battles of Prague, Kolin, Leuthen, Kunersdorf and Torgau to try to defeat enemies in un-attackable positions. Friedrich August von Finck at Kundersdorf and Hans Joachim von Ziethen at Torgau were both assigned the diversionary role of the Comte de Lorge, while Frederick reserved for himself that of the great Turenne.⁷⁵ Frederick described the outflanking manoeuvre in detail in his *History of the House of Brandenburg*, and in his *General Principles* he noted admiringly ‘how Turenne did at Colmar [Turckheim], where he presented his first line to the front of the Elector Frederick William and the second slipped by hidden roads onto the flank of that prince, whom he attacked and put to flight’.⁷⁶

In the sentence directly following his praise for Turenne’s manoeuvre at Turckheim, Frederick described the Duc de Luxembourg’s victory at Fleurus in 1690, where, ‘favoured by the wheat, which was very high, he passed a corps of infantry around the flank of the Prince of Waldeck’.⁷⁷ Frederick frequently praised Luxembourg’s generalship in his writings, and many Prussian officers shared this admiration.⁷⁸ In early 1756, Frederick’s brother, August Wilhelm, was reading Luxembourg’s ‘memoirs’: probably Jean de Beaurain’s *Military History of the Duc de Luxembourg* (published 1756-8) or his *Military History of Flanders between the Year 1690 and 1694* (published 1755).⁷⁹ The officers of the Ziethen Hussars also bought copies of a book on Luxembourg’s campaigns.⁸⁰ Frederick recommended Quincy’s *Military History of the Reign of Louis the Great, King of France* as

the best work to consult on Luxembourg's 1693 victory at Neerwinden, and his account of Fleurus (written in the 1740s, before the publication of Beaurain's works) seems also to have followed Quincy.⁸¹ Indeed, Frederick confused Fleurus with Neerwinden in the 1748 French version of his *General Principles*.⁸² Writing to August Wilhelm in 1756, Frederick's praise of Luxembourg's 'vigilance . . . and his coup d'oeil to make the decisive move in battles' echoed the verdict of Feuquières on Luxembourg's 'wise and judicious movement [at Fleurus], which could not have been thought of except by a *grand homme* whose coup d'oeil was so accurate that he knew he would have precisely enough time to make the movement without the enemy being able to have cognisance of it'.⁸³ At Leuthen in 1757, Frederick himself succeeded in moving his forces around the enemy flank, concealed by the terrain, thereby demonstrating the coup d'oeil of a *grand homme* like Luxembourg.⁸⁴

In his 1749 poem *The Art of War* – a work meant not for his officers but for his intellectual inner circle – Frederick also made comparisons with the Prince de Condé and Maurice de Saxe.⁸⁵ The Prussian king described battles where the enemy was in a strong defensive position on a 'hill / Whose summit dominates the plain for a great distance'. In such cases, said Frederick:

The commander . . .
 . . . can conquer . . . by a masterful coup d'oeil,
 If he makes a careful choice of places and times,
 If he attacks his enemy by his weak side.
 On his right an infantry corps advances,
 It scales the mountains despite the artillery fire;
 Attacked in their position, outflanked, confounded,

The enemy breaks and flees in panic,

. . .

Thus was the great Condé victorious at Freiburg;

Thus, in front of his king, on an equally great day,

One saw near Lauffeld the valiant Maurice [de Saxe]⁸⁶

The battles of Freiburg (1644) and Lauffeld (1747) were much harder-fought than Turckheim and Fleurus, as the French attacked strong positions and suffered very heavy casualties.

Frederick would have been well aware of this from the Marquis de la Moussaye's *Relation of the Campaigns of Rocroi and Freiburg in the Years 1643 and 1644* (1673), which was in his library, and from Prussian officers who observed de Saxe's campaigns.⁸⁷ Frederick's description of Freiburg and Lauffeld paralleled his own victory at Soor in 1745, also achieved against enemies in strong defensive positions. *The Art of War* thus foreshadowed not only Frederick's use of the oblique order during the Seven Years War but also the mixed results he would obtain with it. While the battle of Leuthen would yield a victory to rival Turckheim and Fleurus, Frederick's attempts to 'conquer by a masterful coup d'oeil' would also involve attacks on enemy positions at Prague, Kolin, Zorndorf, Kunersdorf and Torgau that were every bit as costly as Freiburg and Lauffeld.

Frederick's desire to associate his 'oblique order' with the tactics of French commanders – primarily from the age of Louis XIV – is highlighted by his neglect of other potentially relevant historical examples. The 371 B.C. battle of Leuktra is celebrated by modern historians as the first use of the oblique line, but Frederick's writings scarcely mentioned it.⁸⁸ Frederick's 1759 *Reflections on the Military Talents and Character of Charles XII, King of Sweden*, in which he compared himself to the Swedish king, described Charles's victory at

Kliszów in 1702 as having been won by a flank attack, and his 1701 victory at the Duna river as having been achieved through ‘a ruse’, inviting comparison with Frederick’s own victories using such tactics.⁸⁹ Frederick, however, was here using Charles to embellish his achievements after the fact. While (as discussed below), Charles XII did influence Frederick’s military methods, there is no evidence of Frederick referring to the Swedish king’s use of outflanking tactics before the Seven Years War. Robert Citino has cited the Great Elector’s victory at the 1656 Battle of Warsaw as a classic Prussian outflanking manoeuvre, and Frederick described the battle in detail in his *History of Brandenburg*, but he did not particularly stress outflanking movements as bringing about the victory, and did not mention the battle in any of his specifically military treatises.⁹⁰ While the victory at Warsaw reflected prestige on the Hohenzollern family, Frederick was most keen to emulate the great generals of the age of Louis XIV, and his *History of Brandenburg* noted that Turenne’s victory at Turckheim was achieved at the expense of the Great Elector.⁹¹ In emulating it, Frederick was thus out-doing his great ancestor.

Whether Frederick’s oblique order was inspired by examples from military history rather than by contemporary works of military science is hard to state with certainty. The sections of Frederick’s 1748 *General Principles* and 1755 *Thoughts and General Rules for War* which described the oblique order cited only one historical example: Frederick’s own victory at Soor, where, said Frederick, the broken terrain had prevented the Saxons and Austrians from using their superior numbers and the oblique order could achieve the same effect.⁹² Turckheim and Fleurus were praised as examples of ruses and detachments, not direct parallels for the oblique order.⁹³ This was not necessarily surprising, as Frederick presented the oblique line as his own invention, not as something learnt from others.⁹⁴ Certainly many of the military theorists Frederick read – Raimondo Montecuccoli, Feuquières, Santa Cruz,

Quincy, Puységur and Saxe – recommended outflanking manoeuvres, or attacks on only a part of the enemy line, leaving open the possibility that Frederick's oblique order was inspired by one of them. Feuquières and Quincy, however, mentioned such tactics only perfunctorily, whereas their examples from military history were much more detailed.⁹⁵ Puységur's work was published only in 1748, and Frederick did not mention the works of Santa Cruz and Montecuccoli in his writings until 1753 and 1756 respectively.⁹⁶ In contrast, as noted above, there is firm evidence of Frederick reading about Turckheim by 1745 at the latest, the 1748 version of the *General Principles* described the outflanking movement at Fleurus, and Frederick's descriptions of Freiburg and Lauffeldt were written in 1749. Frederick had first issued orders for oblique attacks in 1741 (the same time when Belle-Isle apparently first gave him Deschamps's work), and he began to drill the Prussian army in the tactic from 1746.⁹⁷ Strikingly, although Frederick received a draft copy of Saxe's *Reveries* only in 1751, he falsely claimed to his brother that the work had inspired the *Art of War*, written two years previously.⁹⁸ It was a vivid demonstration of Frederick's desire to ape the achievements of the great French commanders.

The outflanking manoeuvres and surprise attacks of Turenne and Condé reflected the methods of the mid-seventeenth century and particularly of the Thirty Years War, where most armies were relatively small and mobile, containing a high proportion of cavalry. In contrast, the campaigns of Marlborough and Eugene saw much larger armies, with a high proportion of infantry, and Marlborough was particularly known for his tactics of breakthrough in the centre. Indeed, Jean Béranger has noted that Turenne's outflanking movement at Turckheim resembled his similar manoeuvre at Freiburg in 1644.⁹⁹ Frederick described the destruction of the Thirty Years War with horror, and emphasized the difference between the ordered armies of his own time and the 'mass of bandits' of previous eras.¹⁰⁰ He

also acknowledged, however, that ‘M. de Luxembourg and the great generals who made the age of Louis XIV illustrious had been formed in the civil war [preceding it]’.¹⁰¹ In his *Art of War*, Frederick juxtaposed the outflanking movements of Freiburg and Lauffeldt with ‘those [battles] known under the name of regular affairs’, where armies confronted each other head-on. Frederick described these latter as ‘obstinate’, ‘bloody theatres’ where ‘one sees . . . the murderous blade flash’.

Thus the great Eugene, at that famous village [Blenheim/Höchstädt, 1704]

Where Tallard and Marsin were so badly posted,

With a general effort from all sides

He broke through their centre, he split their army

. . .

Thus near Almanza [in 1707] when the lilies triumphed [under the Duke of Berwick].¹⁰²

Frederick thus made a distinction between the frontal attacks of the huge armies of Eugene, Marlborough and the Duke of Berwick, and the flanking attacks employed by his favourite French generals. As Frederick himself noted, he was able to achieve such outflanking manoeuvres because of what he called the ‘admirable discipline’ of the Prussian soldiers, which made them ‘so nimble and so agile’.¹⁰³ Although he sought to imitate ‘the great generals of the age of Louis XIV’, Frederick’s oblique order, whether consciously or not, also reflected the military methods of the Thirty Years War.

III. ‘Natural Impetuosity’

Frederick during the inter-war years also stressed tactics of attacking with the bayonet, rather than stopping to fire, that were particularly associated with the French.¹⁰⁴ Quincy portrayed such tactics as particularly suited to the French national character, and this was a widely-held opinion throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Both Saxe and the Chevalier de Folard advocated troops attacking with edged weapons rather than stopping to fire, and Saxe noted that Charles XII also used such tactics.¹⁰⁶ Frederick maintained an excited correspondence with Saxe 1745-9, entertaining him in Potsdam in 1749, and Saxe's victories at Roucoux in 1746 and Lauffeld in 1747 – both achieved through repeated frontal attacks (although, in each case, only against a portion of the enemy front) – offered an important practical example for Frederick.¹⁰⁷ Writing to d'Argens in July 1747, after Lauffeld, Frederick said, 'these animals [the allies] have seen three battles lost [Fontenoy, Roucoux and Lauffeld] . . . *for having let themselves be attacked in their positions* and they fall always into the same faults, for which they will be reproved by the Caesars, the Condés, the Turennes and the Montecuccolis, and booed by the Feuquières'.¹⁰⁸ Frederick praised Saxe at length in his writings, and used similar tactics in first years of the Seven Years War.¹⁰⁹

The influence of French military literature must not be over-stated, as aggressive tactics were by no means the sole preserve of the French. Prince Leopold I of Anhalt-Dessau, Prussia's most distinguished soldier of the early eighteenth century, was known for reckless infantry attacks, with even Folard describing the Prussians at Cassano in 1705 'throwing themselves bravely into the water quite rashly for Germans'.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Frederick's tactics responded to the practical example of his own victories at Hohenfriedberg and Soor, where the Prussians successfully attacked with fixed bayonets.¹¹¹ Moreover, Frederick seems to have had a compulsion to place himself in

risky situations, an inclination surely stemming from his violent upbringing, and this can be seen as contributing to his rashness on the battlefield.¹¹²

Rather than being his sole inspiration, French ideas were important for Frederick in justifying his aggressive tactics. When he published an *Extract* of the work of Folard for the use of his officers, Frederick specifically removed from it a description of the column formation for which Folard was famous.¹¹³ Instead, the *Extract* primarily presented historical examples from the War of the Spanish Succession. A large proportion was taken up by Folard's account of the battle of Cassano, which repeatedly emphasized the effectiveness of bayonet attacks, particularly when combined with French 'natural' 'impetuosity'.¹¹⁴ The *Extract* was thus *not* an invitation for Prussian officers to learn from Folard's tactical system: Frederick had already set out his own system of war in his *General Principles*.¹¹⁵ Instead, the *Extract* was a profession of faith in the spirit of all-out attack that Frederick in the inter-war years sought to instil as the precept for battlefield victory. In justifying a philosophy that came naturally to him in any case, and that was informed by the experience of Hohenfriedberg and Soor, Frederick drew on the rich seam of French military thought espousing such tactics.

IV. 'Short and Lively' Wars

Moreover, Frederick's famous strategy of 'total war for limited objectives' – 'short and lively' wars to seize territory and then hold onto it through a quick peace settlement – was inspired by French practice, and particularly by Frederick's favourite work of military science: the *Memoires* of Feuquières.¹¹⁶ Frederick read Feuquières as crown prince, mentioning it in a December 1738 letter to his friend, Colonel Camas.¹¹⁷ In June 1740, Frederick listed it as one of the two books to be read aloud in the Berlin cadet school at mealtimes.¹¹⁸ Feuquières was another of the three books on military subjects that Frederick

asked to be sent to him after Soor (the last of the three – Voltaire’s *Fontenoy Poem* – showed Frederick’s interest in French literature describing heroic feats in battle).¹¹⁹ It may therefore be assumed that Frederick kept a copy of Feuquières constantly with him.

The influence of French ideas on Frederick was dramatically illustrated in his conquest of Silesia, which took advantage of the overwhelming Habsburg weakness on the death of Charles VI, with the empire’s finances in a parlous state, few troops to defend it, and the succession of Maria Theresa disputed.¹²⁰ Frederick and Schwerin oversaw a lightning winter campaign through Silesia in December 1740 and January 1741, blockading the few Habsburg garrisons in their fortresses, occupying the undefended Silesian capital, Breslau, and racing on to occupy almost the whole province, leaving the isolated Habsburg fortresses at Glogau and Brieg to be overwhelmed one after another. Unable to evict the Prussians from the province, and with an international coalition forming to dispute the Austrian succession, the Habsburg Field Marshal Neipperg agreed the Convention of Klein-Schnellendorf on 9 October 1741, conceding much of Silesia to Prussia in return for a ceasefire.¹²¹ On 9 November 1741, scarcely a month after Klein-Schnellendorf, Frederick sent 25 copies of Feuquières’s *Memoirs* to the Prussian general Hereditary Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau for distribution to his officers.¹²² Feuquières’s treatise set out exactly the strategy Frederick had just employed. Reflecting the cynicism of long-eighteenth-century international law, Feuquières advised a prince to ‘use . . . pretexts . . . to get into conflict with’ ‘their neighbours’, exactly as Frederick had done.¹²³

Feuquières recommended that a prince use surprise attacks with overwhelming force to make ‘some conquest, which he can hold onto through a peace treaty’ before other powers could intervene.¹²⁴ An ‘offensive war’, said Feuquières, ‘must never be undertaken except to

achieve some profit and to finish it before . . . [it] degenerate[s] . . . into one waged between equal powers'.¹²⁵ Describing the Dutch War (1672-8), Feuquières argued that, rather than fighting the Dutch, Louis XIV could have used some pretext to invade and conquer the Spanish Netherlands, at a time when the Emperor was in no state to oppose him.¹²⁶ Feuquières also advocated the use of battles to decide campaigns or even entire wars, saying 'a battle at the commencement of a war, given in the right way, almost always decides its success'.¹²⁷ This was Frederick's concept of 'short and lively' wars.¹²⁸

To illustrate his philosophy, Feuquières repeatedly criticised Louis XIV's conduct of the 1667-8 War of Devolution, and particularly his decision in 1667 to besiege the frontier fortresses of the Southern Netherlands rather than pushing on to Brussels.¹²⁹

The Spanish had very few troops, their fortresses were in a very bad state and shorn of munitions of war. The king was master of the countryside. Therefore, it was essential to bring the army before Brussels. That capital, in no state to sustain a siege, would have opened its gates. The other big towns without defence would have done the same . . . What would the troops who were shut up in the fortresses have been able to do, other than surrender them one after the other?¹³⁰

This was exactly what Frederick did in Silesia. Feuquières noted that stopping to capture the border fortresses gave time for the formation of an alliance against France.¹³¹

It would have been easy to conquer the whole Catholic Netherlands in the campaign of 1667, and that which had been conquered would have been just as

easily held through the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle . . . because there would have been . . . no power in a state to force him to abandon his new conquest.¹³²

In November 1741, having quickly over-run a province through a surprise attack, then secured it through a peace treaty before any other power could intervene, Frederick presented to his officers the treatise that had inspired his strategy.

Frederick, however, was inspired not only by historical examples of French strategy but also by his own experience of the recent past. His correspondence as crown prince shows that the 1733-5 War of the Polish Succession was a formative experience for him: particularly the cynical manoeuvring of the French statesman Cardinal Fleury.¹³³ Frederick's 1738 *Considerations on the Present State of the European Body Politic* described the success of France's surprise attacks in Italy and on the Rhine at the start of the war, noting that 'France . . . its finances being in the best order in the world, its magazines provided with all the things necessary, and its troops in the state that one could desire', was easily able to overcome the Habsburgs, who had 'no army to close the passage to the enemy, no magazines, nor sufficient troops to guard the fortresses'. Frederick also emphasized that, despite having won the war, France 'offered peace to the empire, its defeated foe', thus securing the cession of Lorraine.¹³⁴ This was again the strategy of surprise attacks for limited objectives.

In February 1737, before there is definite evidence of him reading Feuquières (whose work was first published only in 1736), Frederick described to his father's minister Grumbkow a plan for a surprise attack with dragoons and hussars to capture the disputed duchies of Jülich and Berg. He would concentrate his infantry and heavy cavalry in Brandenburg, ready to 'fall upon' 'anyone who appears to want to oppose my designs' and, with his cavalry in

possession of the duchies, would secure their cession to Prussia.¹³⁵ While such boldness reflected Frederick's risk-taking personality – he openly acknowledged to Grumbkow 'the impetuosity of my temperament' when discussing Prussia's strategic options in March 1738 – the plan also reflected Fleury's strategy, whose effectiveness Frederick had been able to observe as a volunteer on the Rhine battlefield in 1734.¹³⁶ Indeed, Frederick later described his own possession of Silesia as comparable to French possession of Lorraine, which had been conquered through Fleury's surprise attack.¹³⁷

Such plans for surprise attacks were certainly not confined to the French. The Marquis of Santa Cruz, another of Frederick's favourite military authors, also described such attacks, and listed pretexts to justify them. 'The prince who . . . carry[ies] the first blow to the enemies', he said, 'takes entire provinces from them before they find themselves in a state of defence'.¹³⁸ Santa Cruz advised that, 'you may arm under the pretext of another enterprise, different to that which you project' and indeed Frederick in 1740 used his claims to Jülich and Berg to cover his real plans against Silesia.¹³⁹ Moreover, one of Santa Cruz's historical examples was uncannily similar to Frederick's intervention in the Austrian succession:

Don Alfonso VII, King of Castile, . . . set himself on campaign with an army of Castilians as soon as Don Alfonso, King of Aragon, had died and before Don Ramirez, his heir, had forces ready to hold onto the conquests of his predecessor. Alfonso, having thus profited from this favourable moment, recovered without opposition [many territories].¹⁴⁰

Even the work of Santa Cruz, however, showed the influence of French practice. He noted Spain's unhappy experiences when, 'several times . . . the French would take large numbers

of fortresses from us while our kings would be making their alliances and raising their troops'.¹⁴¹ Frederick first mentioned Santa Cruz in his writings in 1753, so there is no direct evidence that the Spanish thinker guided his strategy in 1740.¹⁴² Rather, Santa Cruz shows that there was a wider European concept of surprise attacks to seize territory from neighbouring states, and that contemporaries saw Louisquatorzean France as a prime example of the use of this strategy. Frederick's invasions of Silesia in 1740 and Saxony in 1756 followed this tradition.

Santa Cruz's comments on how quickly the French were able to take the field reflected not just the strategy of pre-emptive attacks that the French employed in the early wars of Louis XIV but also the logistical advantages that made it possible. It was the supply system introduced by the Le Tellier that enabled the French to advance quickly into the United Provinces in 1672, and allowed them again and again to take the field before their opponents, besieging fortresses like Valenciennes and Cambrai (1677), Ghent and Ypres (1678), and Mons (1691) in March or even February, before their enemies had any chance to relieve them.¹⁴³ In contrast, the Habsburg empire always struggled to mobilise its resources.¹⁴⁴ Both Marlborough and Eugene achieved bold manoeuvres at the strategic level – most famously in the run-up to their victories at Höchstädt and Turin – and Frederick repeatedly praised Eugene's boldness.¹⁴⁵ The British and Habsburgs, however, could not achieve the kind of surprise attack at the beginning of a war that Frederick learnt from French practice.

Shortly before writing in his *Considerations on the European Body Politic* about how France's well-stocked magazines and well-prepared troops enabled them to surprise the Emperor, Frederick on 1 November 1737 wrote to Grumbkow admitting his 'rashness', but saying:

It seems to me that heaven has destined the king [his father Frederick William I] to make the preparations that wisdom and prudence require one to make before beginning a war; who knows that Providence does not reserve it for me to make glorious usage of these preparations.¹⁴⁶

Frederick clearly intended the letter to flatter his father, but his words were also a recognition that Frederick William had provided precisely the strong finances, full magazines and well-trained troops that would make possible the kind of ‘rash’ surprise attacks he planned.

As noted above, Frederick avidly read about the campaigns of King Charles XII of Sweden, and indeed he wrote to Voltaire during his invasion of Silesia describing himself as ‘like Charles XII’s chess king’: a reference to Stanislas Leszczyński, Charles’s puppet king of Poland, but also an indication that parallels to Charles were on his mind during the invasion.¹⁴⁷ The description, in Frederick’s 1759 *Reflections* on the Swedish king, of Charles’s bold surprise attack against Copenhagen in 1700 certainly invited parallels with Frederick’s similarly bold invasion of Silesia.¹⁴⁸ As both Frederick and Voltaire noted, however, Charles was famous for his limitless conquests, not for quick peace treaties to hold a captured province in the style of Feuquières and Fleury.¹⁴⁹ However much Charles influenced Frederick to make his wars ‘lively’, it was French practice that taught him to try to keep them ‘short’.

During the Seven Years War, however, Frederick turned away from the methods of short and lively wars. After the terrible loss of life attacking strong Austrian positions at the battles of Prague and Kolin in May and June 1757, Frederick stopped making attacks in the French

style with fixed bayonets. His 1758 *Reflections on Certain Changes in the Manner of Making War* noted the strength of Austrian defensive positions and the power of their artillery, declaring that it was impossible to attack them ‘without having . . . superior or at least equal firepower’.¹⁵⁰ In this work, Frederick praised Feuquières, but declared that, ‘since his age (‘siècle’), war has become more refined; new and murderous methods have rendered it more difficult’.¹⁵¹ Frederick’s 1758 offensive against the fortress of Olmütz was also the last time he would ‘carry the war to his enemies’ with a surprise offensive in the manner of Feuquières and Santa Cruz.¹⁵² In his 1759 *Reflections on Charles XII*, Frederick accepted that growing firepower made ‘audacity’ in battle too risky, and that he had been strategically ‘too impetuous’ in his strategy of ‘pushing spearheads [forward]’.¹⁵³ Frederick’s last use of an outflanking manoeuvre in the manner of Turckheim or Fleurus was at Torgau in 1760. His art of war thereafter focused on positional warfare, with heavy concentrations of artillery.¹⁵⁴ Instead of the French, Frederick now described himself as aping the Austrians.¹⁵⁵ The Seven Years War was also the nadir of French military fortunes in the long eighteenth century. In France, as in Prussia, it prompted moves away from the methods of ‘the Age of Louis XIV’.¹⁵⁶

V. Conclusion

The military ideas of Frederick the Great in the first half of his reign were fundamentally influenced by French examples, and particularly by the towering figure of King Louis XIV. Although Frederick’s personal command of his armies reflected the Enlightenment idea of the *grand homme*, he thereby sought primarily to out-do the Sun King, whom Voltaire had criticised for merely accompanying his armies while his generals won battles for him. Blanning has portrayed Frederick as engaging deftly with the new public sphere, but Frederick’s ‘personal rule’ of his army as military *grand homme* – and the ideas of Voltaire –

also looked backwards to the age of Louis XIV. Jeroen Duindam has described how, ‘with its gaze fixed on the past and for the most part with the methods and concepts of traditional kingship, monarchy backed toward the threshold of the modern era’, and personal monarchical leadership in war in the early eighteenth century certainly followed this pattern.¹⁵⁷ Charles XII followed the tradition of Swedish warrior kingship exemplified by Gustav Adolph.¹⁵⁸ King George II of Britain’s service at the battle of Dettingen in 1743 similarly reflected long-standing British and Hanoverian concepts of the Christian warrior prince, while Louis XV of France’s presence with his army in 1745-6 followed the tradition of Louis XIV.¹⁵⁹ Despite the growing influence of the Enlightenment and the public sphere, traditional models of kingship continued to have a strong influence on war into the middle of the eighteenth century.

The example of Frederick shows that French cultural influence in Germany in the long eighteenth century was also expressed in military terms. Frederick’s attempt to create his own ‘Age of Louis XIV’ (or ‘Age of Frederick’) was not only a cultural project but also a military one, in which Frederick sought to emulate the great generals of the Sun King. The examples of French commanders like Condé, Turenne, Luxembourg and Saxe inspired Frederick’s famous outflanking tactics, and Frederick eagerly used the work of the Chevalier de Folard to justify his tactics of attacking with the bayonet. Frederick’s famous concept of ‘short and lively’ wars, with surprise attacks to seize territory and hold it at a quick peace settlement, were inspired by his favourite military author, the Marquis de Feuquières, by French practice in the early reign of Louis XIV, and by Cardinal Fleury’s strategy in the War of the Polish Succession.

Luh has noted that, in trying to emulate Louis's cultural patronage, Frederick did not in fact support new authors, as the Sun King had done, but instead emphasized the great French works of the *grand siècle*.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Condé and Turenne had been formed by the era of the Thirty Years War, with its much more manoeuvrable armies containing a high proportion of cavalry. Thus, in emulating the great generals of the 'Age of Louis XIV', Frederick's oblique order also looked back to the Thirty Years War. Jeremy Black has argued that the substantial technological change in warfare in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries represented a distinct 'military revolution', or at least part of a steady 'evolution' of warfare in the early modern period.¹⁶¹ The example of Frederick shows, however, that, whatever the trajectory of technological development, military ideas by no means necessarily develop over time, and successful generals may eagerly embrace the methods of the past.

The evidence of French influence on Frederick seriously challenges concepts of a 'German Way of War' supposedly determined by Prussia-Germany's exposed geographical position. Brendan Simms has argued that Germany's central position made it, for centuries, 'the semi-conductor linking the various parts of . . . Europe', and the influence first of French and then Austrian methods on Frederick shows that, rather than geography predisposing Prussia-Germany to a specific way of war, its position in central Europe exposed it a variety of influences from the military methods of its numerous powerful neighbours.¹⁶² The French themselves employed a variety of ways of war and, while the early years of the reign of Louis XIV were characterized by aggressive surprise attacks to seize territory in the style of Turenne and Condé, Louis in his later years sought to consolidate his gains behind Vauban's fortresses, with the defeats of the War of the Spanish Succession reducing him to a much more defensive position.¹⁶³ Frederick the Great was not following a monolithic 'French Way of War' but rather specific approaches popular in France in certain periods. Stereotypes of

national ‘ways of war’ therefore seem highly questionable. The example of Frederick shows the need for a trans-national approach to the history of military thought, examining the transmission of military ideas across state and linguistic boundaries.

Abstract

This article demonstrates that the military ideas of King Frederick the Great of Prussia up to the Seven Years War (1756-1763) were primarily inspired by France, and particularly by the towering figure of King Louis XIV. It examines the intellectual inspirations for Frederick’s military ideas, showing that French military influence reflected the strength of French cultural influence in the long eighteenth century and the importance of Louis XIV as a model for monarchical self-representation. Frederick’s famous personal command of his armies reflected the Enlightenment concept of the ‘great man’ (*‘grand homme’*), but Frederick thereby sought primarily to out-do the Sun King, whom Voltaire had criticised for merely accompanying his armies while his generals won battles for him. The example of Frederick thus demonstrates that not only rulers but also enlightened philosophers often looked backwards toward older monarchical examples.

Frederick sought to create his own ‘Age of Louis XIV’ in the military sphere by imitating the great French generals of the Sun King. Frederick’s famous outflanking manoeuvres followed the example of great French generals, reflecting the practice of the more mobile armies of the mid-seventeenth century. Frederick used French practice to justify his attacks with the bayonet, and his ‘short and lively’ wars reflected French strategic traditions. The evidence of French influence on Frederick seriously challenges concepts of a ‘German Way of War’, and indeed of supposed national ‘ways of war’ in general, emphasizing instead the need for a trans-national approach to the history of military thought.

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